

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THE HOUSEHOLD

Geographical, economic, consanguineal, and religious factors all entered into the evolution of the Creek confederacy. They took concrete shape in the household, family, clan, phratry, clan moiety, town, and town moiety.

Women owned the houses and were permanent occupants, moving only as new houses were built for them or as the entire group to which they belonged migrated seasonally or permanently. These houses were also the homes (hûti) of the nearest male blood relations, those whom the women called "uncles," "brothers," and "sons." They, however, normally went to the homes of their wives as soon as they were married, besides spending much time in the public square and in the tokofa. On the other hand, aged men, whose wives had died and whose children were grown up and scattered, might come back to the homes of their childhood, or, as frequently happened, they might spend their last years moving from house to house among the women of their own clan connection—never, however, among those of the clan connection of their wives.

A typical Creek home would therefore consist of a man and woman, their children, one or more sons-in-law, some grandchildren, some aged or dependent individuals of the same clan group, and perhaps an orphan or two or one or more individuals taken in war. These last, though somewhat looked down upon at first, were rapidly assimilated with the tribe which had captured them and soon came to be appreciated in accordance with their proven merit. There was nothing that may properly be called a slave system among the Indians of the Southeast. Where polygamy existed the wives were generally own sisters and usually inhabited the same house, though there were cases in which a man had wives living in two or more distinct houses.

THE FAMILY

GENERAL REMARKS

A fairly accurate clue to the Muskogee conception of the "family" is furnished by the terms of relationship. These consist of a number of root words, not now analyzable, and words formed from these which it is natural to assume are secondary in importance. Many terms are of the "classificatory" type, covering a number of individuals who to our way of thinking bear quite distinct relations to the speaker. Theorists have tried to maintain that this collective use preceded the special or individual use, but so far as the Muskogee are concerned the evidence points to the special application as having been, if not the original, at least the typical or primary. Secondary or derivative

592

[562]•

[591]

[888]

[597]

[567]

[595]

601

589. When they have eaten and drank together, they return home by sun-rise, and thus finish their solemn Yah-ah.

"Although a widow is bound, by a strict penal law, to mourn the death of her husband for the space of three or four years; yet, if she be known to lament her loss with a sincere heart, for the space of a year, and her circumstances of living are so strait as to need a change of her station—and the elder brother of her deceased husband lies with her, she is thereby exempted from the law of mourning, has a liberty to tie up her hair, anoint and paint herself.

"The warm-constituted young widows keep their eye so intent on this mild beneficent law, that they frequently treat their elder brother-in-law with spirituous liquors till they intoxicate them, and thereby decoy them to make free, and so put themselves out of the reach of the mortifying law. If they are disappointed, as it sometimes happens, they fall on the men, calling them *Hoobuk Wakse*, or *Skoobále*, *Hassé kroopha*, 'Eunuchus praeputio detecto, et pene brevi;' the most degrading of epithets."

548 A class of prostitutes existed among the southern Indians, composed of those who had committed adultery and had been cast off by their husbands, and those who for any other reason had become outcasts. Such women are said to have been the only ones to paint their faces. It was among them that many of the temporary marriages already spoken of were contracted.

171
589 It is hard to explain where Milfort got the idea that a Chickasaw widow was buried alive with her husband, for which there is not the slightest evidence outside of his own testimony.²⁰ It is not impossible, however, that he derived it in some manner from the ancient Natchez custom which applied only to widows of members of the nobility or Suns. Some color is lent to this suggestion by the fact that the Natchez and Chickasaw were more or less mixed together in the Chickasaw country and among the Upper Creeks. But neither with the Natchez were widows buried alive; they were first strangled.

DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE SEXES

• 562 Jackson Lewis, one of my oldest and best informants, said, "In ancient times men and women were almost like two distinct peoples." 592 In fact the old habitations usually comprised two or more buildings in one of which the woman spent most of her time while her husband occupied the other and entertained there his male friends. To the present day this division is kept up in one form or another. Sometimes there are two small buildings with an open porch between; sometimes two rooms end to end with open fireplaces at the opposite ends. In Plate 7, a, is shown a typical Seminole house in Oklahoma

²⁰ Adair, *Hist. Am. Inds.*, pp. 126-127.

²¹ Milfort, *Mém.*, p. 202.

SWANTON]

GENERAL CUSTOMS

385

as it appeared in 1912. This was largely because it was thought that to sleep much with women enervated a man and incapacitated him as a warrior.²⁰ Adair says that in their town houses the women were separated from the warriors, and were merely allowed to sit at each side of the entrance "as if they were only casual spectators,"²¹ and anciently they had no seats on the square ground. Among the Chickasaw six old beloved women were the only participants in the annual ceremony.²²

Regarding the labors of women the last mentioned writer declares: "The women are the chief, if not the only, manufacturers; the men judge that if they performed that office, it would exceedingly depreciate them."²³ In fact women anciently, in addition to the indoors work of the house, made all of the pottery and basketry, and did all of the spinning and weaving of bison hair, mulberry bark, etc. The initial preparation of skins was sometimes performed by men, but most of the subsequent work upon it fell to the women. They made drying frames and dried peaches and other fruits upon them, and they of course pounded the corn and did the cooking.

The principal occupations of the men were hunting, ball playing, war, and rites connected with the use of medicine and ceremonial affairs. They built the houses, the corncribs, and the structures belonging to the square ground, felled trees, made canoes and mortars, drums, pipes, calumets, ball sticks, and of course in elden times the axes and the arrows, bows, war clubs, and most of the other articles used in hunting and war. When hunting at a distance from home they cut up the meat, loaded it on horses, and brought it back. It is evident that their labors amounted to considerable in the aggregate, although they were not so evenly sustained throughout the year as those of women. The smaller garden plots were cared for almost exclusively by women, but the town fields were tended by individuals of both sexes, and Bartram says that "there are not one-third as many females as males seen at work in their plantations; for, at this season of the year, by a law of the people, they do not hunt, the game not being in season till after their crops or harvest is gathered in, so the males have little else with which to employ themselves."²⁴ Later on in the season the same writer tells us that the labor falling upon women was harder.

"In the hunting season, that is in autumn and winter, the men are generally out in the forests, when the whole care of the house falls on the women, who are then obliged to undergo a good deal of labor, such as cutting and bringing home the winter's wood, which they toot on their back or head a great distance, especially those of the ancient large towns, where the commons and old fields extend some

²⁰ Given in Schuchardt, *Ind. Tribes*, vol. v, p. 372.²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.²² Adair, *Hist. Am. Inds.*, p. 121.²³ Bartram in *Trans. Am. Eth. Soc.*, vol. 12, p. 21.²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.562°
[833]
592

462

[224]

[241]

[224]

462 miles to the woodland. But this labor is in part alleviated by the assistance of the old men, who are past their hunting days and no longer participate in the wars; who remain in the towns. They have likewise the aid of horses in this work. The women also gather an incredible amount of nuts and acorns, which they manufacture into oil for annual consumption."³³

• 562 Altogether Bartram's judgment regarding the position of women among the Creeks was very favorable.

"You may depend upon my assertion that there is no people any where who love their women more than these Indians do, or men of better understanding in distinguishing the merits of the opposite sex, or more faithful in rendering suitable compensation. They are courteous and polite to the women, and gentle, tender and fondling, even to an appearance of effeminacy, to their offspring. An Indian never attempts, nay, he can not use towards a woman amongst them any indelicacy or indecency, either in action or language.

"I never saw or heard of an instance of an Indian beating his wife or other female, or reproving them in anger or in harsh language. And the women make a suitable and grateful return; for they are discreet, modest, loving, faithful, and affectionate to their husbands."³⁴

462 On the other hand we find Pope saying:

"The cultivation of the soil and almost every domestic drudgery are imposed upon their women, who are less prolific than ours; probably owing to their hard labor and excessively coarse and scanty diet."³⁵

Romans says: "The labour of the field is all done by the women,"³⁶ and in another place he thus enlarges upon their work in general. The "principal exercises [of the men] at home are ball playing in the manner afore related, and the just mentioned dances; the women are employed, besides the cultivation of the earth, in dressing the victuals, preparing, scraping, braining, rubbing and smoaking the Roe skins, making mackens of them, spinning buffaloe wool, making salt, preparing cassine drink, drying the *chamærops* and *passiflora*, making cold flour for travelling, gathering nuts and making their milk; likewise in making baskets, brooms, pots, bowls and other earthen and wooden vessels."³⁷

562 Hawkins says tersely that the Creek men made slaves of their women who in turn exercised "absolute rule, such as it was, over their children."³⁸

However, Swan is as usual the leading devil's advocate against the Creeks. He remarks:

³³ Bartram in Trans. Am. Eth. Soc., vol. III, pp. 31-32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁵ Pope, *Tour*, p. 60.

³⁶ Romans, Nat. Hist. E. and W. Fla., p. 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁸ Hawkins, *Lectures*, in Ge. Hist. Soc. Colls., vol. IX, p. 26.

"The women perform all the labor, both in the house and field, and are, in fact, but slaves to the men, being subject to their commands without any will of their own, except in the management of the children. They are universally called wenches; and the only distinction between them and the negro women is, that they have Indian children; and when a man would have you understand that he is speaking of his wife, he designates her as his son's mother, etc. Yet in this unhappy, servile state, the women are remarkable for their care and attention to the men, constantly watching over them in their desperate drunkenness and quarrels, with their utmost solicitude and anxiety. . . ."¹¹

"A stranger going into the country must feel distressed, when he sees naked women bringing in huge burdens of wood on their backs, or bent under the scorching sun, at hard labor in the field; while the indolent, robust young men are riding about, or stretched at ease on some scaffold, amusing themselves with a pipe, or a whistle."¹²

In another place we read:

"The men, in general, are of a good size, stout, athletic and handsome: the women are of good height, but coarse, thick-necked and ugly. Being condemned, by the custom of the country, to carry burdens, pound corn, and perform all the hard labor, they are universally masculine in appearance, without one soft blandishment to render them desirable or lovely. Both sexes have a phlegmatic coldness and indifference, uncommon and unknown to most white people."¹³

This last statement Swan confirms by citing the apparent indifference exhibited by a husband and wife when they met after a long separation.

I may add that in 1911-12 I was several times told that Creek Indians would let their wives walk home from town carrying heavy loads, while they hung about for some time and finally hired a liveryman to take them, perhaps passing their wives on the way.

Nevertheless, the condemnation of the Indians by Pope, Swan, and others is as unintelligent as the praises bestowed by Bartram. A people or a person can be judged properly only by observing the conformity or lack of conformity which their actions bear to the ethical and social standards among them, not by the measure of ethical or social standards among other people. And secondly, the presence or absence and in general the intensity of emotions can not be assumed because their expression is less or different from that to which the critic is himself accustomed. I have already called attention to Swan's misconception regarding marriage relations owing to the difference between the significance of Indian and white terms

¹¹ Swan in Schneider, Ind. Tribes, vol. v, p. 272.

¹² Ibid., p. 273.

¹³ Ibid., p. 274.

181
562
[593] of relationship.⁴⁴ In the quotation given above he³ makes another blunder when he assumes that from the apparent indifference exhibited by an Indian couple when they meet after a long separation a constitutional "phlegmatic coldness and indifference" may be inferred. The self-restraint and seeming unconcern exhibited was simply a native custom from which nothing at all regarding the real feelings could be deduced. It may be added that the hard life of Indian women to which he refers was not usually considered hard by them but as the customary and essential, and it was in large measure but their share of a life which was harder all around than the lives of many civilized human beings. It was certainly not as hard as the lives of many of our sweatshop and mill operatives, and there is this to be said for it besides that it did not exist side by side with and thereby shame a theoretically lofty moral standard. On the other hand the "care and attention" which Creek women bestowed upon their men must be read in connection with the drastic regulations to which a widow was subjected.⁴⁵ Collective virtues and vices are so closely bound up with economic conditions that it would be easy to show how both as they exist among Indians show to advantage or suffer in comparison with virtues and vices among ourselves. It is probably true also that white contact by putting an end to intertribal warfare and to hunting, the chief occupations of the men in olden times, has shown up the division of labor between men and women with some disadvantage to the men, because the old traditions regarding division of labor have persisted into a period when a new arrangement is rendered necessary. This is not said with the idea of justifying Indian or European customs. Some of these were doubtless due to economic conditions which were indeed their sufficient excuse at one time. Many, too, may be perversions of customs which once had some reason for their existence though the perversions themselves have not and never had any such basis. In these cases history may furnish a palliation and an excuse but it can not give a justification, and the sooner such custom is abolished the better.

[177] It is not just then to condemn the Creeks on account of some of their customs or to praise them overmuch on account of others. But, abstracting the customs themselves from the people, we may say that those of the Creeks were upon the whole on a distinctly higher level than the customs of most of the hunting tribes of American Indians and indeed than those of most of the agricultural tribes about them.

BURIAL

764 In the accounts of burial customs, as well as in those of marriages, there are considerable differences, and here again it is evident that

⁴⁴ See p. 378.⁴⁵ See pp. 382-384.

‡[i.e., Swan. -- Analyst]

There are some instances on record of women who received the rank and title of warriors,¹² but in a Hitchiti story collected by Gatschet a woman's brave deed was recompensed by conferring a war title upon her son.

That the scalps might be repainted from time to time and made to play a part in later ceremonies is shown by what Adair says of the Choctaw. "At the time Mobile . . . was ceded to Great-Britain, the lower towns of the Choktah brought down all the Chikkasah scalps they had taken, in their thievish way of warring, and had them new painted, and carried them in procession on green boughs of pine, by way of bravado, to show their contempt of the English."¹⁴

The following account of ceremonies actually witnessed by Adair is most interesting in this connection:

"In the year 1765, when the Chikkasah returned with two French scalps, from the Illinois, (while the British troops were on the Mississippi, about 170 leagues below the Illinois) as my trading house was near the Chikkasah leader, I had a good opportunity of observing his conduct, as far as it was exposed to public view.

"Within a day's march of home, he sent a runner ahead with the glad tidings—and to order his dark winter house to be swept out very clean, for fear of pollution. By ancient custom, when the outstanding party set off for war, the women are so afraid of the power of their holy things, and of prophaning them, that they sweep the house and earth quite clean, place the sweepings in a heap behind the door, leaving it there undisturbed, till *Opde*, who carries the ark, orders them by a faithful messenger to remove it. He likewise orders them to carry out every utensil which the women had used during his absence, for fear of incurring evil by pollution. The party appeared next day painted red and black, their heads covered all over with swan-down, and a tuft of long white feathers fixt to the crown of their heads. Thus they approached, carrying each of the scalps on a branch of the ever-green pine, singing the awful death song, with a solemn striking air, and sometimes *Yo He Wah*; now and then sounding the shrill death *Whéo Whoop Whoop*. When they arrived, the leader went a-head of his company, round his winter hot-house contrary to the course of the sun, singing the monosyllable *Yo*, for about the space of five seconds on a tenor key; again, *He He* short, on a bass key; then *Wah Wah*, three times, gutturally on the treble, very shrill, but not so short as the bass note. In this manner they repeated those sacred¹⁵ notes, *Yo, He He, Wah Wah*, three times, while they were finishing the circle, . . .

¹² For one such see *Bacon, Narr. Voy.*, vol. 2, p. 42.

¹³ Adair, *Hist. Am. Inds.*, p. 316.

¹⁴ Adair calls them "sacred" because he believed the Indians to be descended from the Hebrews and these monosyllabic syllables to be an attempt at the name Jehovah.

727
703
562 ●

727
648

727
796